

# BULLETIN

*of the*

National Association of School Social Workers

VOL. XXI

SEPTEMBER, 1945

No. 1

Paper given at the Local Chapter Meeting of the A. A. S. W.  
Detroit, Michigan, April 27, 1945

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## SOCIAL WORK AND THE SCHOOL

Social Work and the Schools—the subject of our discussion today—*itself suggests a relationship between two great fields of American effort united by the common purpose of making America possible.* The roots of social work are in man's concern for his fellowman, and for the general social welfare; in a concern for the amelioration and eradication of social evils, and the strengthening of man to make and use social opportunity. The roots of education are in man's concern that the cultural heritage be passed on to each succeeding generation—in order that a literate and well-informed general public may be able to govern itself and enjoy and enrich its collective life.

Each of us in his separate work—in typical American fashion, tends to be so engrossed in what he is doing, and so convinced of its importance that he is sometimes a little ignorant, perhaps suspicious, and somewhat critical of what is going on at the other fellow's work bench. But we are living in a time of crisis for this country—and we are living in the shadow of the loss of a great leader. We cannot afford to be either ignorant or destructively critical of any American undertaking which advances this country's purposes. We must pull together to keep our barque afloat. And it is in that spirit that I would like to consider today the separate contributions of social work and public education, and how those contributions can be related in the interest of the common good.

It is of real practical interest to examine these questions in Detroit since the Schools of Michigan have just recently introduced a social work function to help them accomplish their school purpose. I want

to make it clear here that whatever I say today is spoken in ignorance of the details of the problems this new program may nor may not have created in your local situation. It will have value only as it serves as a base for your own future discussions.

The decision to appoint visiting teachers on public school faculties involves schools in the selection, training and supervision of personnel in order that a social work function can be discharged effectively, and it involves them, too, in a closer relationship with social work and social workers in the community since both schools and social agencies serve the same children. When school social workers or visiting teachers are employed on public school faculties, community social workers and public schools tend to ask help from each other in the conduct of their separate jobs more frequently than is true when the school has no social work personnel of its own.

Why do I say that in the appointment of visiting teachers Michigan has introduced a social work function in the schools? Doubtless many—perhaps all of Michigan's educators would deny that—a little fearful or skeptical of the purposes and methods of another profession—social work—and wishing to keep clear *their* purpose as educators.

As I understand it, Michigan schools have appreciated their responsibility for helping school children develop attitudes and strengths which will enable them to live socially and use socially the knowledges and skills the public schools transmit. Michigan schools have appreciated that children who are failing to develop social attitudes and social strengths usually show that difficulty in the way they behave in school. They may show it in daydreaming and inattentiveness, in nail biting, tension, grimacing and hyperactivity; in failure to work to capacity; in destructive fighting, rebellious behavior; in anti-social activity such as stealing and sex offenses; or in outright truancy. The Schools have appreciated that all of this behavior in just a given child's way of saying "I am finding trouble in growth—I can't manage creative social functioning without help." They have realized that for all of these children the schools are failing of their purpose, that teachers' time is being wasted, and that the children themselves are becoming potential destroyers rather than creators of tomorrow's high destiny. Just as certain conditions in the body may make it impossible for that body to change what it eats into the minerals and vitamins necessary to sustain life—so conditions in the psyche of the child may make it impossible for

him to take what he needs from school or other life experiences to grow.

Through employing visiting teachers, Michigan has sought to help school children who are failing to use what the school offers. But "helping individuals in respect to the difficulties they encounter in their use of an organized group's services"<sup>1</sup> (and one organized group is the public school) is precisely how social work has been defined. And it is to develop the knowledge and skill necessary to do that job that Schools of Social Work have developed.

Perhaps public schools would not fear identifying the purpose of their newly appointed visiting teachers as a social work purpose if they appreciated that social workers employed by agencies whose purpose is something other than social work (for example, by hospitals or by juvenile courts) do not seek to distort the purpose of the employing agency—but rather to assist in its realization. Hospital or medical social workers are employed for the express purpose of helping the hospital be more effective as a hospital—court social workers (probation officers) to help the court do a better job as court—and so, too, properly used school social workers (or visiting teachers) can help the public school be more effective—as public school.

The social worker's preparation fits her to understand why an individual may be having difficulty in social living—to know the various community resources that may be helpful to him, to appreciate when and how to call on community resources, and to use skill in interviewing which has as its purpose the releasing of the strengths an individual himself possesses for the righting of his own craft no matter how badly it may have floundered.

It seems important to me that the public schools, far from accepting a social work purpose for themselves, should identify and keep clear their own purpose as schools and then see how a social worker on the faculty can help them accomplish that school purpose.

The school is an *educational* institution. That is why it was created and that is why it is maintained by the general public. It is *not* a juvenile court established to determine whether children are acting within or without the law and to take appropriate measures to help them live within it. It is *not* an organization designed to prevent juvenile delinquency, although if it does its job as school well, the

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<sup>1</sup>Witmer, Helen *Social Work* Farrar and Rinehart New York 1944

lessening of juvenile delinquency may be a very important "by product" result. It is *not* a psychiatric hospital or clinic expected to diagnose and treat mentally ill children and restore them to mental health. It is *not* a child placing agency charged with the responsibility of finding foster homes for children whose parents are no longer able to provide them with the care they require. It is *not* a family society or consultation bureau instituted to help families solve problems in family living. It *is*, I repeat, an educational institution—whose purpose is to *teach* children to communicate certain knowledges and skills. It is aware that, in addition to realizing its primary educational purpose, it provides an experience of great social value for each of America's children—an experience in learning to relate to a reasonable and just authority and to share teacher time and attention with other children; it makes available an opportunity for every child to get satisfaction from a job well done, to evaluate himself in relation to others, and to come to an acceptance of the kind of person he is and the kind of contribution he can make.

Aware that successful experience of this nature is vital in contributing to the development of such character in its children as will insure a wise use of what they learn, the school tries to provide the kind of program and the kind of personnel which will be favorable for children's learning these lessons in social living as well as for mastering the three R's and other areas of knowledge important for them as social citizens.

But the school is aware too that not all children can use even the most favorable school situation for their healthy growth—some can neither "learn their lessons" nor profit from the opportunity for social living which the schools present. It is to help these children that school social workers have been appointed and school social work departments organized throughout the country.

A public school system in a city somewhat comparable in size to Detroit, in an effort to make its Home and School Visitor (or Visiting Teacher or School Social Work Department) more effective and in an effort to influence the quality of home and school visitor service throughout the state, two years ago appointed a committee to draw up qualifications for Home and School Visitor personnel. That committee made the following report: (I might add that due to a succession of unfortunate circumstances the report was filed away and never came to the attention of the State Department of Education—to which it was addressed. Perhaps Michigan can do better.)

## Proposed Revision of Statement of Function of the Home and School Visitor

1. To help the individual child find a personally satisfying and socially effective place in the school and community picture and to make available to him whatever facilities may be at hand or may be developed to accomplish this end.
2. To help the school adjust its program to the particular needs, interests, and capacities of the children with whom the Home and School Visitor works.
3. To help parents and others (including representatives of social agencies) to understand the purposes and program of the school and, in their relationships with the child, to facilitate his best use of school.
4. To stimulate the community to recognize a responsibility to its children that is greater than the provision of schooling facilities.

It is recognized that the performance of this function involves interviewing or counseling with individual children, their teachers, parents, and community persons including representatives of social agencies. It involves bringing to the school an understanding of the out-of-school life of the child—and bringing to the home and community an understanding of the school life of the child. This kind of counseling, the purpose of which is to help the child *use* what the school has to offer him for his own and the community's welfare, requires a special kind of educational preparation which is different from that required of a classroom teacher.

The following requirements are therefore suggested for the certification of Home and School Visitors (in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania:)

### A. REQUIRED

1. Bachelor's degree with teacher's certificate.
2. Eight semester hours in courses covering the following content:
  - a. Behavior and personality development of the "normal individual"—2 hours.
  - b. Community organization—or the field of social work—(content dealing with a description of the social services available in communities and with methods of using them in the interest of the child)—2 hours.

c. Introduction to Sociology, Introduction to Psychology, Child Welfare, Health and Disease, Social Security, Labor Problems, Public Assistance, Group Work, Social Case Work (especially recommended), Psychopathology, Abnormal Psychology—4 hours.

*Desirable*

1. Bachelor's degree with teacher's certificate.
2. Graduation from an accredited\* two-year school of social work with a major in social case work.

*or*

**B. REQUIRED**

1. Bachelor's degree without teacher's certificate.
2. Completion of one year (including the equivalent of two semesters of field instruction) in an accredited school of social work with a major in social case work.
3. Six semester hours in Education.

*or*

1. Registered Nurse with Bachelor's Degree.
2. Completion of one year (including the equivalent of two semesters of field instruction) in an accredited school of social work with a major in social case work.
3. Six semester hours in Education.

**C. MOST DESIRABLE PREPARATION**

1. Bachelor's degree (with or without teacher's certificate)
2. Graduation from an accredited two-year school of social work with a major in school social work (including two semesters of field instruction in Home and School Visiting or School Social Work in the public schools).

The Committee went on record as having the following convictions:

1. The position of Home and School Visitor is a legitimate and dignified one, essential for the Schools' best accomplishment of its own purpose as school, and is not to be regarded merely as a "stepping stone" to some other position within the school system such as classroom teacher, girls' adviser, or other.

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\*The accrediting organization is the American Association of Schools of Social Work, Executive Secretary, Miss Leona Massoth, 4200 Fifth Ave., Pittsburgh, Pa.

2. It requires for its accomplishment a special preparation which can best be secured in an accredited two-year school of social work.
3. It is desirable that such education be (1) *in addition to* full teacher training leading to a teacher's certificate, or (2) include a specialization in Home and School Visiting or School Social Work.
4. The salary scale of the Home and School Visitor should be commensurate with the salary scale for other positions within the school system requiring a comparable educational preparation—and involving to a comparable degree the exercise of judgment and the assumption of responsibility, i.e., the equivalent of the secondary school salary scale.
5. A stable corps (with minimum turnover) of fully prepared Home and School Visitors is required if a Home and School Visiting Department is to function effectively. (It cannot be used as a "training experience" for future principals, girls' advisers, etc., to such an extent that there is a proportionately inadequate number of fully prepared staff to carry on the work of the department.)
6. It is recognized that to carry out their own duties, classroom teachers, girls' advisers, principals, and others may need to secure a greater understanding of the individual child in his social situation than has been theirs in the great majority of instances. This kind of understanding can be secured through their enrolling in certain selected courses in schools of social work.

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The problem public school systems find in identifying the Visiting Teacher or Home and School Visitor as a *social worker*, and in insisting on social work preparation for visiting teachers—seems to arise out of distrust on the part of school people as to the "kind of animal" a social worker is.

It might be important to get out at this time some of the factors which in the past have stood in the way of the appointment of social workers in public school faculties and which have interfered with good working relationships between schools and social agencies. Schools have accused social workers of prying and poking into the private affairs of school children and their families.

Social workers know families for one of two reasons—either because the family has itself requested the service the social agency is offering—or because the community has expressed a serious concern that conditions are not right in a family—for the healthy growth

of children. In that case the community supported social worker *must* stay in the picture until community standards are met.

Schools have accused social workers of being vague and using technical language that obscured what they were trying to say. Social workers are working on those "occupational illnesses" and I hope and believe are making some progress. Schools have accused social workers of befriending "bad children" who should be punished instead of "pampered." Social work seeks neither to punish nor to pamper—but to understand and help. The social worker's whole purpose is to release strengths for social living—to enable individuals to set and abide by their own controls, to chart their own direction, to live according to society's rules. She knows that scolding and arguing will not accomplish these purposes.

Schools have accused workers, too, of "trying to tell them what to do" and of making impractical suggestions for changes in school administration. Here the social worker may have sometimes been in error. Certainly the school has the right to conduct its own affairs as it sees fit, subject to the same controls which bind the social worker—public support and approval. It has been—or should be—the social worker's intent to individualize the child for the school—I mean to share her understanding of this child in his out of school life so that the school may itself decide on any change it may wish to make in order that the child may be better served.

Schools have complained that social workers move slowly—"It takes them so long to accomplish things." "When the principal asks that a family be given financial assistance, the assistance is not forthcoming, etc." Social agencies operate according to policies and procedures which have been drawn up not to make things confusing and hard and long-drawn-out for clients and referring persons, but rather to insure the best possible service to the client—and the wisest possible expenditure of community funds. As for their pace—heavy case loads, staff shortages, and at times an individual social worker's own tempo may mean that a situation *does* move slowly—yet in the last analysis, it is the client—not the worker—who determines how fast things move.

School people have said that social workers never tell them anything—never "report back" on how things are going with a child and his family. Social workers might profit from that frequently made comment and remember their responsibility to keep the school in-

formed—as one interested participant in helping the child they both serve meet his problems.

Social workers have been accused of thinking they had a corner on understanding people and knowing how to help them. Perhaps social workers can be more articulate about their appreciation of the understanding teachers have—out of long experience in dealing with children and of the way of helping teachers have, as teachers, different—but no less real than the social worker's way.

And finally schools have complained that social agencies are inept and bungling in some instances—and awkward in their relationships with each other. It is good for social workers to hear and act on this kind of criticism which has some foundation in fact.

And what have social workers said of schools and school people? Some social workers have reproached school teachers for not being social workers, for not having the kind of understanding, the purposes, nor the special skills of the professionally prepared social worker. That is unfair. Social workers need to appreciate and respect the unique and valuable contribution the teacher makes as teacher. Her whole value to the child would be lost if she stopped being a teacher and became a social worker. She needs to represent limits necessary for classroom discipline, to require conformance, and participation in class projects. Her understanding and warmth for any child are tremendously important to him, but they need to be exercised in her capacity as teacher. Social *case* workers—working with *individuals* have sometimes failed to appreciate the responsibility of the teacher to the group—and have asked for a kind of teacher activity in relation to one child—which would seriously interfere with the teacher's relationship to other children—and to the group as a whole!

Social workers have accused teachers of being more concerned with teaching subject matter than with teaching children; of being rigid and inflexible, and sometimes sarcastic and bullying. Individual teachers may err in the direction of these *their* “occupational diseases,” but to anticipate that all or most of the teaching profession will be like a small minority in some unlovely aspects is unreasonable.

It would be possible to multiply this list of mutual accusations indefinitely. But perhaps the purpose has been served—if we appreciate that what has already been said suggests that “difference” may breed

distrust. It is so easy to see and so hard to feel that difference does *not* necessarily have a superior-inferior connotation. Teachers are not *better* than social workers—nor social workers *better* than teachers. They are *different* in their preparation and their purpose. They need each other—and children need them both.

In the course of any recriminations of teachers by social workers, or social workers by teachers—it can be helpful to remember the words of the Polish Count Kryzybski<sup>1</sup> who suggested spacing and timing of thinking as one way of avoiding trouble in social relationships. Count Kryzybski would urge teachers to chant: “Social worker 1 is *not* social worker 2 is *not* social worker 3 . . . and social workers to repeat: Teacher 1 is *not* teacher 2 is *not* teacher 3.” In other words, spacing thinking means understanding that individuals need to be appreciated on their own merits—and not expected to take on the characteristics of another person who happens to be a member of the same occupational (or other) group.

In encouraging us to “time” our thinking, Count Kryzybski undoubtedly would suggest the following exercise for teachers: Social work 1900 is *not* social work 1930 is *not* social work 1945—and for social workers: Public education 1900 is *not* Public education 1930 is *not* Public education 1945. *Time Marches On*, and social work and social workers, teachers and school systems march and change with time. We need to get acquainted in the present—face to face—individual to individual.

The profession of social work wants, I am sure, to make available to visiting teachers who are fulfilling a social work purpose in the schools, (most of whom, as I understand it, are former classroom teachers who may have had to assume responsibilities for which they are not prepared) its support and encouragement—its appreciation of a shared general purpose, and whatever of its knowledge and skills the public schools can arrange for this new personnel to secure. It is natural for school men to doubt that any special preparation is needed to “talk with children who are not getting along in school”—they point out that teachers have done that since schools came into existence. But the kind of “talking with” and “working with” for social purposes that social work has evolved has a scientific base—and has become the core of a new profession which has already taken its place with the older professions of medicine, teaching, and law.

Social work wants to make available to the public schools and their visiting teachers its skills and its encouragement—and the resources of agencies in which it is one service or in which it is the principle or only service—such as family agencies, children's agencies, recreational agencies, and others. As I have said, the appointment of visiting teachers in school systems means that more children may have the opportunity of receiving the services of community social agencies than was formerly true since visiting teachers will be alert to children who might profit from the services of those agencies.

Social workers, on the other hand, may well be encouraged to make a better use of schools than they have—appreciating anew what a good school experience can mean to children—bringing their understanding of children they know to school people—acquainting themselves with how children known to them are using school. Their own professional discipline must keep them from “telling the schools what to do.” They will anticipate that the school will want to make whatever adjustments it can to serve its children well. This closer relationship between community social workers and the schools can mean that social workers may gain both a new respect for what schools have to offer children—and a new appreciation of limitations within which public schools must function.

Wishing as it does to be useful and helpful to visiting teachers discharging a social work function in the school system what does social work hope and expect from visiting teachers and the schools—so that from this “rapprochement” of social work and education better service to the community may result—rather than confusion and bitterness. First social workers hope, I suppose, in this—as in other communities, that school personnel, including visiting teachers, will feel themselves not competitors of professional social workers, but rather as joint contributors to a vital social purpose. They expect that visiting teachers and their principals, superintendents, and Boards of Education will seek not to underestimate and devalue the skill that is the social workers, but will welcome every opportunity to make that skill the visiting teachers' own. They expect that visiting teachers will seek to learn what social agencies are functioning in their community—what they are set up to do—what they have public support to do—and under what conditions—and in what ways they operate. They expect that visiting teachers will seek neither to duplicate the work of existing social agencies—not to tell them how to do their jobs—anymore than social workers seek to duplicate or direct the work of the public schools.

It is inevitable that as social workers and teachers, and as community social workers and school social workers, learn how the other works, and experience, in relation to children jointly served, the potentialities and limitations of the other's services, there will be some grinding of gears. Mutual criticism can serve as a correction to both social work and public schools, if it is given with appreciation of the other's general good intent.

Perhaps help over potential moments of friction may come from an awareness of the urgency of our national situation and of the importance of a common social purpose: to help make this America all our great have dreamed it could be—have proved in their own living it could be—a country which values every man, which believes in every man and which seeks to use the contribution of every man. We have much to unite us, and we must be united. Michigan is undertaking an experiment which can have social significance for the entire country. The country is watching that experiment believing that the practical Americans engaged in it can make it work for the welfare of the community—and the community's children.

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